



Governing diversity through AI: DEI and procedural trust in public service media

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Abstract

Public service media are adopting artificial intelligence at a moment when diversity, equity and inclusion policies are increasingly politicised. Drawing on comparative qualitative research in the United Kingdom and Australia, this article examines how AI is embedded within Public Service Media governance and platformised audience infrastructures. We argue that AI operates not merely as a technical tool but as a cultural and institutional logic through which diversity, risk and legitimacy are reconfigured. In this shift, trust in diversity moves from relational practices grounded in representation and accountability toward procedural confidence embedded in automated systems, standards and compliance regimes. We conceptualise this transformation as the rise of *procedural trust*: a reorganisation of institutional legitimacy through technical infrastructures rather than social relations. Our thematic analysis shows how platform capitalism reshapes public service media by depoliticising diversity and redistributing responsibility across governance systems, with significant implications for democratic legitimacy.

Keywords

diversity, AI, trust, UK, Australia, public service media

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Introduction

Public Service Media (PSM) are being reshaped by artificial intelligence (AI) at a time when diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI)¹ are politically contested and ideologically reframed. Across liberal democracies, AI is promoted as a solution to institutional crisis, promising efficiency, innovation and renewed public trust. Yet this technological turn unfolds alongside backlash against diversity initiatives (Lee, 2024) and intensifying debates over race, representation and legitimacy. In this conjuncture, AI does not simply modernise public institutions; it reorganises the cultural and political conditions under which diversity, and trust more broadly, are articulated. This article examines the meaning of these developments for PSM as a trust-producing democratic institution: the rise of AI and the decline of DEI.

The article makes two contributions. First, a comparative analysis of the UK and Australia demonstrates how diversity is increasingly reconfigured as a technical object of governance within platformised PSM. Second, it conceptualises the rise of what we term ‘procedural trust’, showing how AI-enabled governance redistributes trust away from social relations and towards technical systems, standards and compliance regimes.

In naming this construct, we situate it deliberately within, but distinct from, the broader trust-studies tradition. Sociological accounts have long treated trust as a relational and affective wager under conditions of uncertainty (Luhmann, 1988), an evaluative judgement about the trustworthiness of institutions and their agents (O’Neill, 2002), and a cultural resource sustained by shared norms (Sztompka, 1999). Adjacent, more recent work on algorithmic and automated systems has examined how legitimacy is produced through opacity, audit and proxy measures (Hoffmann, 2021). Procedural trust contributes to, rather than relabels, these trust debates: it names the institutional mechanism by which trust is detached from inter-personal and representational relations and re-anchored in the procedures, datasets and compliance artefacts of platformised governance.

The construct, a claim about where institutional legitimacy now resides and how it is reproduced, is intended to travel. Procedural trust should be most visible wherever three conditions co-occur: a public-facing institution under legitimacy pressure, a normatively contested object of governance (here, diversity), and a platformised infrastructure that supplies the metrics, dashboards and assurances against which performance is read. PSM is a generative site because all three are acute, but can also be mapped onto other sectors such as health, welfare, higher education, policing and financial regulation, where DEI, safety and risk are increasingly governed through analogous technical instruments. We therefore offer procedural trust as a portable analytic, with PSM as its first comparative case.

As well as being policy-relevant, the implications travel beyond Media Studies into platform governance and DEI scholarship. Adopting a Critical Diversity Studies lens informed by cultural and political economy approaches, we situate AI governance in PSM within longer trajectories of diversity’s depoliticisation (Ahmed, 2007; Malik, 2013). Diversity has long functioned as a normative anchor for PSM legitimacy, tied to plurality, universality and recognition (Moss and Edwards, 2025; Titley, 2014); a

failure to represent social diversity leads to alienation and distrust (Davis et al., 2020). However, as platform logics of datafication and optimisation permeate public institutions, diversity is reframed as a governable problem of compliance and risk management. By examining this transformation, the article advances debates in cultural studies on how technological infrastructures reshape public culture, redistribute responsibility and mediate the production of trust in democratic institutions.

The UK and Australia not only share similar public service traditions² and platformisation trends, but also have distinct regulatory and political trajectories, as well as relatively high, albeit declining, trust and engagement in PSM (Fletcher et al., 2025). At the time of writing, ours is the first study of AI and DEI in PSM, and the first to consider the UK and Australian contexts together. The analytical leverage lies in the fact that both the UK and Australia are connected through migration, media, and liberal democratic values, as well as strong traditions of cultural research and cross-national collaboration.

Our key conceptual point is that DEI as procedural trust marks not a loss of trust but a reconfiguration of how trust is produced institutionally, from a social relation between publics and institutions to a managed output of technical systems and compliance regimes. This signals a turn towards DEI as an institutional technology of governance rather than a moral agenda, with implications for PSM practice, policy and governance design more broadly.

Our analytical focus is on PSM's swift integration of AI to manage DEI within the broader trend of 'platformisation' (Poell et al., 2019), and how platform logics reshape PSM's capacity to serve the public interest (Nikunen and Hokka, 2020). PSM's values-driven approach (EBU, 2012) faces a crisis of legitimacy as growth strategies take priority over diversity and plurality (Johnson and Martin, 2025); as AI reorganises diversity into a technical object of governance, trust is decoupled from the social relations that diversity once mediated.

Three key research questions underpin the discussion.

RQ1. How is PSM using AI in DEI processes, and how do the approaches in the UK and Australia compare?

RQ2. What are the implications for DEI as the powers of platforms and AI converge, and what are the characteristics and challenges of this convergence?

RQ3. What does the rise of AI and the decline of DEI tell us about the shifting value of trust in PSM?

Method and approach

Critical Diversity Studies, an aspect of critical race scholarship and diversity studies, interrogates how diversity and difference are managed within organisational practices. This is valuable, as we present a systematic qualitative analysis of theoretically generative use cases in the UK and Australia on how AI is being deployed to manage DEI across PSM's organisational practices and audience outreach. The timing of our analysis intersects with live concerns about media-capture risks for PSM, since large tech companies monopolise information infrastructure. This coincides with specific debates over the

British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) Charter renewal, ABC's diversity strategy and the role of regulatory bodies such as Ofcom and the ACMA.

The original empirical focus of our two-country discursive institutional study is on recent PSM policy documents and organisational statements from 2023 to late 2025 that capture, in real time, how 'diversity' is being situated within AI-enabled PSM models. The deliberate analytic choice not to engage in interviews or focus groups with audiences or PSM personnel reflects the current opacity around AI – a phenomenon in itself. Organisational uses of AI can be inscrutable, but reliance on public-facing documents can be analytically productive. These documents are cultural artefacts of institutional self-legitimation, capturing a period in which AI and DEI are being publicly legitimised amid political contestation and PSM fragility.³ A full enumeration of the documents and materials reviewed is provided in Appendix A. The search terms used to determine documents to review were: 'AI', 'diversity', 'audience', 'DEI', 'personalisation', 'translation', and 'accessibility'. Further, relevant sections of the policy documents were manually coded and thematically analysed using a reflexive thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2019).

Beyond the analytic leverage and cross-national applicability, the UK and Australia have long-established PSM institutions and explicit (though contested) commitments to diversity and inclusion. And yet, they differ in essential ways across regulatory frameworks, AI industrial strategies, approaches to DEI governance, and relationships between public broadcasters and global technology platforms⁴: nuances that enable a theoretically productive comparison. Rather than comparing broadcasters one-to-one, we consider patterns of AI adoption across the mixed ecologies of PSM in each country, including public broadcasters (ABC, BBC, SBS), publicly owned but commercially funded broadcasters (Channel 4, Independent Television (ITV)) and relevant policy and regulatory actors.

For context, there are three PSBs in Australia: the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC, launched in 1932), the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) and National Indigenous Television (NITV) under the SBS mantle. The ABC was explicitly modelled on the BBC, and the distinctive SBS model was launched in the 1970s as the national multicultural broadcaster with a mission to reflect Australia's diversity. These underpinnings are similar to Channel 4 in the UK. We understand PSBs in both Australia and the UK to be typical of the broader national approaches to AI rollout, with both countries adopting policies to encourage AI adoption. Researchers in Australia have raised concerns about relatively weak guardrails, particularly compared with those in the EU (McDonald, 2024).

The ABC and BBC are lead participants in an international project to ensure a robust PSM system committed to public service values and focused on the public good at a time of rapid technological disruption (<https://www.admscentre.org.au/international-summit-on-the-future-of-public-service-media-in-the-platform-era/>). In 2026, discussions around DEI and AI in Australia have focused on First Nations scholarship raising concerns that questions of accountability, harm and care are being ignored in the rapid AI rollout, such that large scale AI entrenches settler colonialism rather than enhancing diversity (Carlson and Worrell, 2026). As an indicator of the 'anti-DEI' backlash, in

April 2026, the ABC announced plans to end memberships with a national Pride in Diversity programme, the Australian Disability Network and the Diversity Council of Australia.

These broadcasters sit within a wider PSM ecosystem that is markedly more ambivalent about AI than their own institutional discourse suggests. The European Broadcasting Union's (EBU) 2024 report frames AI as both an opportunity and a risk for PSM, foregrounding concerns about editorial integrity, data governance, workforce displacement and dependence on commercial foundation models (EBU, 2024). Positioning ABC and BBC against this comparative backdrop allows us to read their relatively confident embrace of AI not as representative of PSM at large, but as a particular institutional posture whose claims to legitimacy, including in the domain of DEI, warrant critical scrutiny.

Our analysis draws on three primary sources of published qualitative data, analysed iteratively alongside the evolving literature on platformisation, trust, diversity and responsible AI (see Appendix A).

- (a) Policy documents and official submissions, including parliamentary submissions, corporate strategies, regulatory guidelines, and industry reports.
- (b) Organisational communications and public statements, including press releases, speeches by senior executives, interviews, blog posts, and official broadcaster announcements relating to AI adoption, DEI initiatives, audience strategies and innovation.
- (c) Illustrative use cases, identified through a systematic review of publicly documented AI deployments, include targeted advertising, translation and accessibility, personalisation, creative production, copyright management, anonymisation technologies, internal DEI tools, and workplace knowledge systems.

Our aim is not to measure the effectiveness of specific AI tools or AI bias, but to analyse how AI is being mobilised discursively within PSM's platformised architecture (RQ1, RQ2), and the implications for DEI and trust as a PSM value (RQ3). A cultural analysis is needed because DEI is a cultural value, trust is a culturally produced relationship and AI is an institutional logic (Pasquinelli, 2023) that shapes meaning, legitimacy and governance. AI governance and DEI are emergent, relational and normatively structured phenomena. We therefore adopt a critical interpretive approach, analysing how AI is framed, justified and operationalised within PSM discourse and practices, and how these are connected to (re) articulations of DEI. This helps elucidate how trust is invoked, redefined or displaced by AI governance narratives. Rather than treating use cases as representative or exhaustive, we see them – from ABC's 'Virtual Ally' harassment-reporting chatbot to the BBC's 'Style Assist' and 'At a glance' accessibility tools – as theoretically generative examples that illuminate broader structural and socially-inscribed dynamics. This approach is consistent with qualitative media and Cultural Studies research, where the aim is analytical insight rather than generalisation.

Research and context

Social acceptance of both PSM and AI depends on how effectively they address the challenge of fostering trust. In this section, we review selected literature on platformisation, diversity and responsible AI, in the context of recent AI+DEI developments in the UK and Australia.

Platformisation

Research on the platform economy conceptualises platforms as socio-technical infrastructures that mediate interactions between user groups whilst extracting, processing and monetising data at scale (Srnicsek, 2016; van Dijck et al., 2018), thereby embedding commercial logics into public institutions with significant implications for governance, visibility and public values. Whilst trust is frequently invoked in these debates, it is often treated as an outcome undermined by platformisation. We instead reframe trust as a relational and institutional process through which platform power is produced and (re)stabilised within PSM contexts. This process is further complicated by backlash against prevailing DEI policy frameworks.

AI tools are increasingly being used to accelerate the capabilities of the platform economy through rapid feature integration, data-driven insights, technological innovation and solution building. Far from being separate from PSM's core values, automated decision-making is reshaping how publicly owned multi-platform media organisations implement their key missions to inform, educate and entertain the public (EBU, 2012). A core PSM value that helps deliver these missions is diversity (Nikunen and Hokka, 2020), broadly understood to mean ensuring diversity in content, views, access and personnel.

AI-driven technology makes PSM increasingly reliant on platform-owned services — for archive management, multilingual production, personalisation and efficiency. AI itself operates through a platform structure, an integrated collection of technologies that develop, train, and run large machine-learning and language models. In the UK, adoption of Generative AI (GenAI) is a trend across public service processes, and the government's AI tool, 'Humphrey', is based on models from Silicon Valley 'Big Tech' corporations OpenAI, Anthropic and Google. A characteristic of the 'platformisation paradigm' is that GenAI providers position themselves as neutral intermediaries (Edwards et al., 2025). Zuckerman (2020) and Nikunen and Hokka (2020) argue that there are fundamental challenges and even contradictions between the values embedded in corporate commercial platforms and PSM. This includes tensions between platforms' deep personalisation priorities and the core PSM value of universality, which legitimises PSM's public-interest role in filling gaps in the media ecosystem. Algorithms and recommender systems, however, are understood to prioritise popularity and leverage AI for competitive advantage over public interest.

The growing literature on platformisation and PSM, including the Public Service Media in the Age of Platforms (PSM-AP) project, addresses a critical question: how are the rise of global platforms and streaming services reshaping PSM regulation, policy and broadcaster practices? (Johnson and Martin, 2025). Several challenges are

highlighted: PSBs are prioritising universal reach through programmes designed to engage large audiences rather than serving niche audiences, and accountability is more vexed in the age of platforms (Johnson and Martin, 2025: 29–30). Whilst diversity is not a major feature of the PSM-AP study, the report indicates that it is being affected by GenAI. Diversity receives scant attention in current platformisation/PSM research, despite choice and representational diversity being central to AI-powered platformisation. As Poell (2020) point out, mirroring debates around digital culture and the public sphere more widely, ‘...platformization is not necessarily conducive to a diverse cultural landscape and democratic public sphere’. According to Bonini and Mazzoli (2022), there is also a growing interest amongst PSM organisations in exploring digital technologies and data-driven strategies that balance adaptation to platform services with the preservation of PSM values.

The salient point is that PSM values of universality, equality, diversity, transparency, independence and accountability sit uneasily with platform logics of commercialisation, datafication and personalisation (Nikunen and Hokka, 2020; van Es and Poell, 2020). Algorithmic personalisation fragments audiences and, through profiling via logins and recommendations, produces a profit-driven hierarchy of more- and less-valued users rather than guaranteeing more diverse content. In Australia, the ABC has partnered with the ARC Centre of Excellence in Automated Decision-making and Society (ADM+S) to examine this tension between PSM values and automated systems, recognising that PSM values are not baked into AI and automated systems; rather, they must be developed and implemented.⁵ Nikunen and Hokka (2020) accordingly call for ethical data practices that protect privacy, transparency and citizen agency, whilst Zuckerman argues for new public-service infrastructures, including public-service algorithms, that revitalise PSM values for the age of AI-driven platforms.

Diversity, trust and public value

Our use of ‘DEI as procedural trust’ contributes to critical political-economy scholarship by showing how trust in public institutions is increasingly produced through procedures, audits and governance systems. Whilst established system-based accounts frame trust as confidence in institutional processes (Luhmann, 1988), critical public administration scholars demonstrate how such proceduralisation performs legitimacy whilst displacing responsibility and political judgement (O’Neill, 2002). For Luhmann (1988), trust reconstructs the complexity of society; a current example is ‘managing diversity’ amid anti-DEI critique and discontent over systemic inequalities (McCabe, 2025). This resonates with Ahmed’s (2007) critique of diversity as a non-performative institutional technology and Malik’s (2013) analysis of the depoliticisation of cultural diversity within PSM. As we will demonstrate, DEI is being translated into metrics, standards and automated systems, reconfiguring diversity as a governance problem rather than a political demand rooted in structural inequality. This enables trust to be managed procedurally, whilst contestation is neutralised (Luhmann, 1988).

If PSM values, such as diversity (Moss and Edwards, 2025), are rooted in social trust within a broader national framework for social cohesion, then the rise of AI deepens

concerns that this trust, and the cohesion it supports, may be undermined. Adding to this crisis in legitimacy, PSM is a key site of AI scepticism for publics (Gillespie et al., 2025). AI attracts further political (and politically expedient) criticism for its bias and opacity,⁶ including sometimes from those with vested interests in the continued dominance and media capture by global tech giants such as Google (Alphabet), Meta (Facebook), Amazon, Apple and X.

Chivers and Allan's (2024) typology of six values – social, cultural, economic, industrial, representational and civic – across PSB's regulatory and institutional frameworks encourages a return to focus on PSB's undergirding principles. One concern is that AI might accelerate a shift identified away from a more equitable and socially oriented politics of cultural representation (Malik, 2013) toward new, generalist frames of universality designed to capitalise on the broad user demographics that platformisation is geared toward (Johnson and Martin, 2025). The communicative risk is not just how diversity might be curated and operationalised via AI, but about the potential erosion of PSB values that have justified its existence in an increasingly crowded media space; a risk compounded by the effects of globalisation, political interference, changing demographics and the cost-of-living crisis (Esser and Steemers, 2024).

Platformisation, therefore, presents a complex landscape for PSM, with organisational narratives centred on threats and opportunities, requiring agility coupled with public purpose (Moss and Edwards, 2025) as part of a 'good digital society'. Developing small-scale, in-house AI+DEI tools (such as the 'Virtual Ally' chatbot we will discuss) can be rationalised as a 'public interest technology' (Walker, 2024), buffering concerns around AI without guardrails (Crawford, 2020; Hao, 2025). However, this is also part of legitimising AI, insofar as it can 'conceal' or 'hide' inherent platformisation problems within broader financialised and neoliberal governance contexts. In this sense, 'threats and opportunities' are structurally-inscribed into platforms as PSM's 'continued political and social legitimacy relies on their ability to promote values like cohesion, universality, independence, diversity, quality and accountability' (Olsen et al., 2025: 1818). The principal question remains whether ethical frameworks centred on technical governance can address the legitimacy challenges facing PSM.

'Responsible AI', DEI and the technical reconfiguration of trust

Even tech heavyweights integral to platformisation, such as Google, emphasise 'freedom, equality and respect for human rights' (Google, 2024). However, ethical guidelines are shifting towards recalibrating how AI may or may not be actively utilised, moving towards not pursuing technologies that could 'cause or are likely to cause overall harm' (Kollewe, 2025). Some EBU countries are developing ethical guidelines for AI use (EBU, 2024) through initiatives such as the EBU School of AI. Australia has outlined what it considers responsible use of AI in public services (Australian Government, 2025).

By foregrounding bias mitigation, explainability and procedural safeguards, it is argued that responsible AI discourse (Hoffmann, 2021) narrows DEI to issues of algorithmic fairness, whilst largely leaving unaddressed the deeper inequalities embedded in creative labour markets, organisational cultures and platform dependencies. Platformised

environments make the concern even more acute because PSMs rely on proprietary technologies developed by global technology companies, limiting their capacity to regulate AI infrastructures directly. In these contexts, responsible AI operates as a compensatory form of governance, allowing public institutions to assert ethical responsibility and accountability in the absence of meaningful control, regulatory or otherwise, over data extraction, model training, or platform logic.

AI for DEI: Use cases

These issues provide important context for the use cases we present in our illustrative review of AI adoption. We start by providing an example of workplace diversity monitoring, then illustrate AI's use for targeting PSM audiences through advertising, language and translation, and content personalisation. These are the areas most prominently discussed in the publicly available materials we surveyed (Appendix A).

Monitoring workplace diversity

Both the UK and Australia appear to share a similar discourse around AI in their industrial strategies: a blend of enthusiasm and apprehension. In Australia, discussions are ongoing regarding AI's role in monitoring diversity within organisations, reflecting a broader global trend toward leveraging AI to assess and enhance workplace inclusivity. Currently, both the UK and Australia continue to encourage DEI in the workplace, and diversity remains a key pillar of PSM policymaking, though this is nuanced differently. In the Australian PSM context, diversity metrics are measured on an ad hoc basis through reporting from Screen Australia (the government-funded peak body for the screen sector) and Media Diversity Australia (an advocacy organisation). However, Australian PSM has no affirmative action policies, unlike the BBC. The ABC charter refers to 'reflecting' and 'servicing' the population in a general sense. Our review notes a public information gap about how AI model implementations are monitored in PSM, and how metrics evaluate AI tools before workflow integration. This raises obvious socio-ethical considerations regarding responsible use, as well as the role of human oversight in mitigating drift and bias that can undermine PSM principles.

As well as diversity in audiences' trust in PSM, it is also about PSM being trustworthy to its own workers. DEI in the workplace is at a critical juncture. On the one hand, it is being criticised for failing to deliver progressive DEI outcomes, as systemic inequalities in workforce patterns prevail across the Creative Sector (McCabe, 2025). In its 2023–2028 Strategic Plan, the ABC has identified 'trust' as its first strategic pillar. The document elaborates: 'We will prioritise and strengthen the trust that our audiences place in us by bolstering our independence, integrity, reliability, and transparency' (ABC, 2024).

The use of DEI chatbots and virtual allyship to provide validation and guidance to groups with protected characteristics raises concerns about potential bias and the training data used. In 2024, Fremantle, the multinational television production and distribution company, was acclaimed for its AI-powered DE&I project, 'Virtual Ally for Everyone', a virtual tool designed to answer EDI-related questions and 'sense-check'

people's experiences, using a diverse experiential dataset. With great concern about the lack of regulatory oversight and accountability regarding creative workforce precarity and harm, the DEI chatbot model connects directly to bias, trust, and surveillance, as well as to the integration of 'socio-emotional AI' (Kolomaznik et al., 2024) into the DEI organisational space.

Sitting in contrast to the discourse we analyse, is the empirical reality for diverse staff, which have recently involved a damning court decision in an unfair dismissal case brought by Lebanese-Australian journalist Antoinette Lattouf and the departure of several high profile media workers citing a systemic lack of cultural safety and/or a failure of the ABC to protect First Nations and culturally diverse staff from racist abuse (Evans, 2024; Muller, 2024). There are similar cases in the UK, indicating systemic problems in DEI implementation, often stemming from an overreliance on identity-based data tied to protected characteristics alongside institutional barriers and behaviours. At the same time, the wider environment is one of mounting diversity scepticism, with several large US corporations scaling back DEI commitments. Within this broader environment of diversity scepticism, DEI in PSM remains an issue to be addressed, with a gap between 'representational value as a PSB priority and how audiences rate the effectiveness of PSBs at delivering it' (Chivers and Allan, 2024).

Targeted advertising

Within mixed PSM ecologies, commercial broadcasters such as Channel 4, SBS and ITV rely on advertising revenue to sustain public service provision. In the context of platformisation, advertising infrastructures are increasingly data-driven and AI-enabled, embedding optimisation, segmentation and behavioural prediction within public service environments. ITV's generative advertising tools (deploying the AI-powered streamr.ai technology) are promoted as enabling companies to produce 'TV-ready' advertisements rapidly and at low cost, whilst integrating the UK Code of Broadcast Advertising directly into automated workflows. Such systems are framed as widening participation and lowering barriers to entry, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises previously priced out of television advertising markets.

Channel 4 similarly presents its use of generative and data-driven advertising technologies as a democratising intervention. Its chief commercial officer, Rak Patel, describes the aim as to 'democratise access to TV' and to use GenAI 'to support the under-represented advertisers and creative teams, not to displace them' (Clearcast). Yet these initiatives are simultaneously embedded within increasingly granular audience segmentation systems. Partnerships drawing on consumer purchasing data, postcode profiling and inferred behavioural insights allow advertising placement to be tailored to highly differentiated audience categories across streaming platforms. Automated contextual targeting tools categorise programme content by theme or emotional tone, aligning advertising with algorithmically derived audience profiles.

Discursively, broadcasters such as Channel 4 (in its partnership with streamr.ai and Telana) emphasise that these processes remain 'human-led' and ethically governed, invoking transparency and regulatory compliance as safeguards. However, this rhetoric

of responsible innovation reframes trust as confidence in procedural safeguards rather than relational accountability. Audience inclusion becomes equated with data-driven reach and market participation, whilst diversity is rearticulated through optimisation and segmentation. ITV, for example, integrates purchasing and household data from Circana, Mastercard and Experian, and partners with Captify to scan ITVX content and align ads with algorithmically inferred emotional context. Critics argue that this kind of differentiated targeting produces more and less valuable consumers in the long run, displacing civic values.

In this configuration, trust is redistributed toward technical infrastructures and compliance systems that promise fairness at scale, even as commercial imperatives intensify differentiation between more and less valuable audiences. Targeted advertising thus exemplifies procedural trust within platformised PSM: legitimacy is sustained through assurances embedded in automated systems rather than through deliberative or representational engagement.

Translation and linguistic diversity

In May 2024, Australia's publicly-funded multicultural broadcaster, SBS, submitted to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Adopting Artificial Intelligence inquiry into AI's opportunities and impacts. Two areas were identified as relevant for outreach to culturally and linguistically diverse and First Nations audiences: first, a request for government-approval to use its services for AI education to reach diverse audiences as well as help preserve First Nations Languages; and second, the use of language-specific AI technologies to ensure SBS content produced in English easily reaches multilingual audiences, and their in-language content is accessible to the general Australian audience. The potential benefits of AI for social cohesion were outlined, particularly regarding speed and scale, access and language support, shared understanding and specific health issues (in addition to the unique SBS News in Easy English service). Specifically, AI's use in transcription and translation, and in AI-assisted production of subtitling, closed captioning, and audio description, was seen as significant. Additionally, the impact on First Nations languages and content, especially on deriving benefit from AI language tools, as many are verbal-only languages with limited databases, was noted, subject to appropriate protocols and the observation and adherence to Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property rights (SBS submission, 2024).

Whilst the AI benefits in this area are clear, they are also entwined with the 'politics of translation' at SBS (Ang et al., 2008), such as the implications of 'vice versa' translation for English language dominance/imbalance. With English as the modern primary programming language, there are invariably consequences for colonial countries where protections for native languages are enshrined in their constitutions, and AI will inevitably pose a greater challenge for some nations. Australia's National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) has a position statement on AI and translation and interpreting services, which will likely shape future decision-making for the PSMs (NAATI, 2025).

In addition to utilising AI for translation and transcription, research in the UK context has been conducted by the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), with input

from the BBC, to explore the accuracy of AI for audio description and to increase access to broadcast media for blind and partially sighted people. The BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Sky have a voluntary commitment to provide audio description for 20% of their content, which is currently provided by human audio describers, with a large amount of content remaining inaccessible. The efficacy of AI was found to be uneven: AI-generated descriptions were fluent and well-structured but frequently lacked accuracy, cohesion, and contextual awareness, often featuring misidentified characters and vague references to objects (RNIB, 2025). As NAATI points out in the Australian context, human-led oversight is essential to ensure a responsible AI-enabled culture delivering high-quality outcomes for diverse service users.

Accessing broader audiences

At the ABC, a broader audience reach through AI technologies dominates the discussion of diversity and AI in its 2024–2025 corporate plan. There is a clear push to ‘individualise’ online streaming and capitalise on ABC iView’s status as a top-ranked Video-on-Demand platform, with a consistent annual increase of 20% in viewing minutes. For ABC, AI has facilitated new opportunities to connect with audiences and ‘investment in personalisation on ABC iView has improved content discovery and enabled a more tailored offering, leading to increased use’ (ABC, 2024). To reach younger audiences, ABC will utilise social media and third-party platforms (with the assistance of AI bots) to engage those who might not otherwise directly access ABC services. Whilst DEI is not explicitly mentioned here, these strategic priorities demonstrate the positive value placed on the ‘diversity dividend’ of wider audiences.

Amidst declining audience share amongst younger people (18–35 years old) and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities, ABC’s ‘Innovation Lab’ in Australia and an AI working group are tasked with making ABC content more accessible through the use of ‘transcription, text-to-speech, summarisation, captioning and translating content into other languages’. Examples include ‘ABC Transcribe’ (Hystek-Dunk, 2023), AI bots and Microsoft Copilot as a creative assistant. According to Olsen et al. (2025), this targeted young audience strategy is closely tied to PSM’s future viability and legitimacy. Where commercial news publishers leverage social media to ‘capitalise on the distributed engagement, eventually converting audiences into paying subscribers’, PSM engage to maintain their legitimacy and achieve expected goals of reach (Olsen et al., 2025).

As with the UK and Australia, a key focus for PSM in countries with similar media models has been to employ strategies that legitimise its role in a digital media environment (Sehl, 2020). A key technique is audience expansion and diversification via social media, typically without significant internal or external challenge (van Es and Poell, 2020). Simultaneously, concerns persist about the risks posed by data-driven governance and datafication within platform economies. Though data analytics and social media engagement certainly secure greater access and reach for PSMs, they depend on the continuous demands of the particular financialised configuration of ‘platform capitalism’ (Srnicek, 2016), centred on data and platforms rather than social transformation. There

is further concern about the effects of data analytics when involving integrating metrics-driven journalism into professional news values, creating a tension between what journalists are ‘economically encouraged to do and what they are normatively inclined to do’ (Welbers et al., 2016: 1050).

Audience personalisation

Whilst audience personalisation may hardly be a new phenomenon, AI has drastically accelerated and intensified it through the kinds of personalisation that are potentially feasible at scale (Fletcher et al., 2025). Comfort with automated selection on social media varies by generation (with younger people tending to be more at ease) and across nations, with much of Europe less at ease than other parts of the world (e.g. Latin America, Asia and Africa) (Jay, 2025). Besides these variations, there are obvious risks to personalisation in terms of bias and representation when leaning into audience preferences, which can undermine editorial values and public interest, especially problematic for PSM (Sehl and Eder, 2023).

In BBC news and journalism, training models are rewriting content for different audiences and story versions, automating summaries, and creating graphic storytelling to engage diverse audiences across platforms. The BBC’s new ‘Growth, Innovation and AI’ Department was established in March 2025 as part of its restructuring process to deliver more personalised audience content, especially for under-25s who tend to consume news on smartphones and social media. Explicit in the narrative about the Department’s purpose was Deborah Turness’s (former Chief Executive of BBC News) comment about the urgency of countering the trend of news avoidance alongside the growth of digital competition and the resulting decline in broadcasting, similar to the recent ABC approach previously discussed. For Turness, the drivers of AI adoption are survival and competition, ‘using AI to support, enable and accelerate our innovation and growth’ (quoted in Savage, 2025).

The BBC’s two trials, Style Assist and ‘At a glance’ summaries, are making complex stories more accessible. Still, they are trained by in-house journalists who the BBC insists will have human oversight to maintain transparency. Alongside this, in another initiative to grapple with issues of trust and responsibility, the BBC’s Research & Development computer vision team collaborates with universities to build in-house AI tools for deep-fake detection (BBC, 2025). For the BBC, ‘Work like this is where the technical and ethical sides of AI meet, and we are ensuring progress goes hand in hand with care and responsibility’ (BBC, 2025).

Discussion – procedural trust as cultural infrastructure

We return to map our analysis onto the article’s three key research questions.

In response to RQ1, we have shown that AI is being deployed in DEI-related processes primarily through indirect and infrastructural means, often with high productivity, as in language and translation. Rather than replacing formal DEI policies, AI operates alongside and beneath them, shaping how audiences are reached, how creative labour is valued

and how accessibility is delivered. 'Inclusion', through personalisation, translation, automation and efficiency, is largely individualised and data-driven, prioritising reach and optimisation over socially driven structural transformation (Hoffmann, 2021). Within our use cases, we find that AI and diversity are connected through socio-ethical concerns about representation, transparency and accountability, which are also recognised as essential for the future public legitimacy of PSM (Moss and Edwards, 2025). The broader point is that PSMs are using AI to administer and 'fix' diversity expectations at the very moment DEI's political legitimacy is being contested, even as critiques of systemic and structural inequalities persist. Through AI, trust appears to be shifting from a socially produced relationship to a governance mechanism that destabilises direct institutional authority amid uncertainty.

Differences between the UK and Australia can be observed in institutional framing and regulatory emphasis. Still, the underlying pattern is consistent: AI extends organisational capacity whilst narrowing the conceptual scope of DEI. Across both contexts, AI is mobilised to reach younger audiences, multilingual publics and underserved groups, often framed as a means to enhance inclusion at scale. These approaches differ in emphasis: UK broadcasters foreground innovation, growth, and competitive positioning within platformised markets, whilst Australian PSM discourse places greater emphasis on social cohesion, multiculturalism, and public legitimacy, even as structural commitments to workplace DEI remain uneven.

Across both contexts, Responsible AI is framed through principles of transparency, accountability, fairness and safety, reflected in policy initiatives such as the UK government's emphasis on pro-innovation AI governance and public broadcasters' internal AI guidelines, as well as Australia's national AI ethics principles and sector-specific guidance for public and cultural institutions. PSM organisations, including the BBC and Australian broadcasters, frequently position these frameworks as mechanisms for building and sustaining public trust, particularly regarding automated decision-making, data use and generative technologies. In a UK-Paris summit in 2025,⁷ there was a clear jostling for power amongst liberal democracies to lead on AI, with responsible AI a key aspect of a nation's AI branding, though over-regulation remains a politically expedient critique by those pushing for a freer market approach, part of the business of seeking to limit the reach and significance of PSM.

Addressing RQ2, we demonstrate that the convergence of platform power and AI significantly constrains PSM's capacity to pursue diversity and inclusion as public values. This is because procedural trust does not resolve crises of institutional trust; it manages them by deferring accountability into technical systems, a technique of deferral. As a result, diversity risks being reframed as a technical problem of bias mitigation, content distribution or audience targeting, rather than as a political and institutional challenge rooted in historical inequality, labour precarity and cultural power. It deepens the trajectory of depoliticisation (Ahmed, 2007; Malik, 2013).

Despite the emphasis on AI's efficiencies, there are growing concerns about its 'hidden costs' (Crawford, 2020), including environmental/climate impacts, labour conditions and baked-in bias and discrimination. Australia's Human Rights Commissioner has recently warned that AI and algorithmic bias have the potential to entrench racism and

sexism in Australia because they are built into AI tools (Dhanji, 2025). These concerns are echoed by the eSafety commissioner, who urges tech companies to be transparent about their training data, develop reporting tools, and use diverse, accurate, and representative data in their products, warning ‘the opacity of generative AI development and deployment is deeply problematic’ (quoted in *The National Digest*, 2025).

RQ3 leads us to build on the article’s central analytical contribution of DEI as procedural trust: a shift from relational to procedural and automated forms of trust, which actively reconfigures the basis on which public institutions claim legitimacy (Luhmann, 1988; O’Neill, 2002). In this reconfiguration, rather than diversity operating as a trust-generating social practice, AI governance reframes diversity as a technical object of management, monitoring and optimisation. As a result, trust is increasingly produced procedurally through standards, audits and ethical frameworks, making it less dependent on relational engagement with publics and workers and more closely tied to system design, compliance and assurance.

Procedural trust is trust that functions in the absence of encounter, dialogue or accountability to affected publics, and we suggest that this is a transferable framework beyond PSM. Within DEI, it relocates trust away from culturally marginalised staff and audiences and toward systems, suppliers, auditors and governance frameworks. Our contribution is to reconceptualise trust as a form of legitimacy-signalling rather than simply observing its decline. As diversity is operationalised within AI-enabled systems, the risk is that trust becomes detached from the social relations that have historically underpinned public legitimacy (Davis et al., 2020), obscuring structural inequalities and limiting the capacity of marginalised publics and workers to contest institutional authority.

Closing comment

This article has examined the intersecting rise of AI and the destabilisation of DEI within PSM in the UK and Australia, and what these developments reveal about the changing value of trust. When examined through a Critical Diversity lens, we suggest that responsible AI functions less as a credible vehicle for advancing structural equality than as a mode of risk management that translates political and institutional questions of diversity and inclusion into technical problems of system design and compliance. We argue that automated trust cannot compensate for the erosion of relational trust where PSM fail to address structural racism, protect culturally marginalised workers or resist the homogenising pressures of platform infrastructures. Whilst AI governance frameworks may promise fairness and transparency, they risk obscuring underlying power asymmetries and institutional failures. In this sense, AI does not resolve crises of trust within PSM; it reorganises them.

The implications extend beyond media institutions. As public organisations increasingly adopt AI to manage risk, efficiency and accountability, the PSM case highlights a broader danger: that diversity and trust may be reconfigured as solvable through systems and standards, rather than as political commitments requiring structural change and sustained relational work. For PSM, the challenge is not simply to adopt AI

responsibly, but to ensure that technological innovation strengthens rather than displaces the public values on which its legitimacy depends.

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This study did not generate or analyse any datasets, as it is based entirely on conceptual and theoretical reasoning.

Notes

1. We recognise that DEI is a contested term and that terminology varies, e.g. EDI, diversity, cultural diversity and creative diversity. We use DEI to refer to its common use as a cultural policy frame.
2. The BBC is widely acclaimed as the chief architect of PSM globally. PSM in Australia explicitly followed the BBC model in establishing the ABC, and its later development, SBS, is an international benchmark for PSM diversity.
3. Future research might build on this analysis through ethnographic and longitudinal studies that examine how AI-enabled DEI practices are experienced by staff and audiences, and how alternative models of public-interest AI might be developed within public institutions more expansively.
4. Gillespie's worldwide survey of AI acceptance indicates higher use and trust in AI in emerging economies as well as differences between comparable countries, reporting 42% trust and 22% acceptance in the UK, and 36% trust and 17% acceptance in Australia (Gillespie et al., 2025: 32).

5. For example, a recent ‘hackathon’ that explored possibilities for developing PSM recommender systems <https://www.admscentre.org.au/2024-adms-hackathon-explores-public-service-media-recommender-systems-with-the-abc/>.
6. In 2026, Donald Trump sued the BBC for US\$10bn, over an edit of his 6 January 2021 speech in the BBC’s Panorama documentary. Trump accused the BBC of using ‘AI or something’ to compile the speech edit footage, with journalists deepfaking ‘terrible...words in my mouth, literally...speaking with words I never said...it’s called fake news’ (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWzbpw_5eJ8). For context, the BBC is struggling to secure a sustainable financial future ahead of the 2027 charter renewal, part of a creeping commercialised (financialised neo-liberal) context that PSM has had to confront.
7. The UK (and the US) notably didn’t sign the broader AI safety declaration at the Summit, whilst Australia became one of 60 signatories for inclusive AI.

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Appendix A: Empirical material

The following table enumerates the documents and publicly available materials drawn on in the analysis, grouped by country and sortable by organisation. Sources are organised by the three categories outlined in the Methodology: (a) policy documents and official submissions; (b) organisational communications and public statements; and (c) illustrative use cases identified through publicly documented AI deployments. The corpus is illustrative rather than exhaustive, in keeping with the article’s critical-interpretive approach.

Country	Organisation	Source / document	Type	Year	Relevance to analysis
Australia	ABC	Strategic Plan 2023–2028 (trust as first strategic pillar)	Corporate strategy	2024	Workplace DEI; trust framing; PSM legitimacy
Australia	ABC	Corporate Plan 2024–2025 (iView personalisation; AI bots)	Corporate strategy	2024	Audience expansion; personalisation use case
Australia	ABC	Innovation Lab / AI working group materials (incl. ABC Transcriber; Hystek-Dunk, 2023)	Organisational communications	2023–2025	Translation, transcription, captioning; CALD audiences
Australia	ABC	Racism review and reporting (Evans, 2024; Muller, 2024)	Press / public statements	2024	Empirical reality vs. DEI discourse; cultural safety
Australia	ABC	ARC ADM+S partnership statements	Organisational communications	2024–2025	PSM values and automated decision-making
Australia	SBS	Submission to the Select Committee on Adopting Artificial Intelligence	Parliamentary submission	2024	Translation/linguistic diversity; First Nations languages; CALD outreach
Australia	Screen Australia	AI Guiding Principles	Regulatory guidance	2024–2025	Sectoral AI governance; DEI reporting context
Australia	NAAATI	Position statement on AI in translation and interpreting	Regulatory guidance	2025	Human-in-the-loop in language services; translation use case
Australia	Media Diversity Australia	Workforce diversity reporting	Advocacy / industry report	2023–2025	Diversity metrics context
Australia	Aus. Parliament – Select Committee on Adopting AI	Inquiry materials and reports	Policy document	2024	National AI policy context; PSM submissions framing
Australia	Aus. Human Rights Commission	Commissioner warnings on AI, racism and sexism (National Digest, 2025)	Press / public statements	2025	Regulatory and rights context for AI adoption
Australia	Fremantle (multinational, AU operations)	‘Virtual Ally for Everyone’ DEI chatbot announcement	Press / corporate communications	2024	Workplace DEI; socio-emotional AI; bias and surveillance
UK	BBC	Growth, Innovation and AI Department announcement (Savage, 2025; Turness statements)	Organisational communications	2025	AI-as-survival framing; personalisation for under-25s
UK	BBC	AI and innovation statements / responsible AI principles	Corporate strategy	2023–2025	Personalisation; editorial oversight; trust positioning
UK	BBC	Style Assist and ‘At a glance’ summaries trial communications	Organisational communications	2024–2025	Personalisation use case; in-house human oversight

(continued)

Continued.

Country	Organisation	Source / document	Type	Year	Relevance to analysis
UK	BBC R&D	Deepfake detection for journalism (BBC, 2025)	R&D / technical publication	2025	Anonymisation and synthetic media; trust and responsibility
UK	BBC R&D	Responsible Innovation Centre research agenda on personalisation	R&D / research publication	2024–2025	Public service personalisation; responsible AI
UK	ITV	stream.ai generative advertising tools; ITVX Dynamic Pause ads	Corporate communications / product announcements	2024–2025	Targeted advertising use case; segmentation
UK	ITV	Captify partnership – Automated Contextual Targeting (ACT)	Corporate communications	2024–2025	Behavioural targeting; procedural-trust framing
UK	Channel 4	Statements on generative advertising and ‘democratising TV’ (Rak Patel via Clearcast)	Corporate communications	2024–2025	Targeted advertising; under-represented advertisers framing
UK	RNIB (with BBC input)	Research on AI audio description accuracy	Research report	2025	Accessibility; translation/accessibility use case
UK	Ofcom / UK regulators	Industry reports referenced (Chivers and Allan, 2024)	Regulatory / industry research	2024	Representational value vs. audience perception
Cross-national	EBU	Generative AI and Public Service Media report	Industry report	2024	Sectoral risk/opportunity framing; counterweight to ‘AI-as-survival’
Cross-national	PSM-AP project (Johnson and Martin)	Public Service Media in the Age of Platforms – research outputs	Academic / sectoral research	2025	Platformisation and PSM regulation; comparative framing

Note. ABC: Australian Broadcasting Corporation; ADM+S: Automated Decision-making and Society; AI: artificial intelligence; BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation; CALD: Culturally and Linguistically Diverse; DEI: diversity, equality and inclusion; EBU: European Broadcasting Union; ITV: Independent Television; NAATI: National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters; PSM: Public Service Media; PSM-AP: Public Service Media in the Age of Platforms; RNIB: Royal National Institute of Blind People; SBS: Special Broadcasting Service.